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STATE FOR EAP/CM AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/03/2018

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SUBJECT: Guo Feixiong Stages Hunger Strike, Is Beaten in Prison

REF: 07 Guangzhou 1229

¶1. (U) Classified by Consul General Robert Goldberg for reason 1.4 (d).

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: Jailed democracy activist Guo Feixiong, who has been on a hunger strike since December 13, was beaten by another prisoner December 18, according to his wife, Zhang Qing. Zhang believes that Guo's mistreatment in prison has been sanctioned by the government, but prison officials reject her allegations. Guo plans to file suit against prison authorities and his attacker, but Zhang worries that the government might raise obstacles to doing so. END SUMMARY.

Hunger Strike

¶3. (C) Guo began his hunger strike -- which he promises will last 100 days -- on December 13, the first day of his prison term. (NOTE: Though his November 14 sentence of five years in prison and a fine of CNY 40,000 (reftel) was ostensibly for "illegal business practices," approximately ninety percent of the court's questions at his trial pertained to Guo's involvement in the ill-fated effort to recall the corrupt chief of Taishi village in 2005. END NOTE.) He did so in protest to instructions from prison officials forbidding him from speaking to any other prisoners and from reading any newspapers or books, according to Zhang. Zhang also told us that prison authorities had drawn a line, which Guo was not allowed to cross, in front of his cell door. An unnamed prison officer disputed these claims, telling Radio Free Asia recently that it was "impossible" for any of these allegations to be true.

¶4. (C) Prison authorities are currently force feeding Guo, according to Zhang. She estimates that he only receives about one-quarter of a normal person's daily intake through this process, and claims that prison officials pressure Guo to work up to eight hours each day, even in his weakened and injured state.

Beaten in Prison

¶5. (C) Guo's December 18 beating by a fellow inmate took place while approximately 200 other prisoners looked on, said Zhang, who also claimed that Guo had previously been warned by Chinese authorities that he would be "given a lesson" when he entered prison. Because of this, Zhang believes that Guo's prison beating was sanctioned by the authorities.

¶6. (C) Guo had calculated that his situation would improve if he accepted his sentence and served his time in prison, according to Zhang. After beginning his term, he told his wife that conditions in prison were even worse than in the detention center and asked that she do everything possible to assist him and draw attention to his case.

Next Steps

¶7. (C) Though Guo has told his wife that he is disillusioned with China's legal system, Zhang told us that Guo plans to file lawsuits against the head of the prison and the prisoner who beat him. Zhang said she had already contacted three law firms seeking help and was currently attempting to acquire power of attorney to start the legal process on behalf of her husband. Without elaboration, Zhang told us she was concerned that "local authorities" might raise obstacles to any such lawsuits.

GOLDBERG